

# Academy of Language Studies

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AKADEMI PENGAJIAN BAHASA  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA



Cawangan Pulau Pinang  
Kampus Permatang Pauh



# EMBRACING DIVERSITY:

## How 'Pride and Prejudice' Shaped My Cultural Identity

At the age of 18, I left Sarawak for Kuala Lumpur expecting a new and exciting chapter, full of possibilities. However, I quickly encountered an unforeseen difficulty in KL: a sense of not quite belonging in either the Malay or Chinese culture. Back in Sarawak, cultural tolerance was the norm, and my dual heritage had never been a problem. This personal journey of unexpected cultural minefield and discoveries draws a parallel with Jane Austen's classic: "Pride and Prejudice". I was put in the same position as Elizabeth Bennet, the spirited protagonist of the novel, where I struggled with preconceived cultural assumptions that challenged my understanding of the world as I knew it.

My experiences at a university with a rich diversity of culture taught me the complexity of cultural identity, much like the scenes in "Pride and Prejudice" where social gatherings and conversations become the springboard for discovery and growth. My mixed parentage had granted me a unique identity, but it seemed like I didn't completely belong to either culture. This sense of displacement made me anxious and befuddled, leaving me longing for the familiar embrace of home.

Startling interactions throughout the first semester left me perplexed with the complexities of cultural norms. One such case came one night at the dining hall when a Malay senior chastised me for eating with a fork and spoon, claiming that as a Malay, I should embrace the traditional practise of eating with my hands. Our table became silent and all eyes turned to me. I hesitantly set down my cutlery and attempted to eat with my right hand awkwardly. I was shocked and disheartened by the sudden scolding, as I had never expected such an innocuous deed to become a cultural fuss.



The following event occurred when a Chinese senior invited me to their social circle, only to question my affiliation with Malay friends. The inquiry highlighted preexisting perceptions and stereotypes that occasionally surface within personal interactions that I would experience again and again in the coming years. As a result, I was caught between these polarised viewpoints, feeling extreme discomfort and alienation.

Like the formal dinners in Austen's novel, these episodes of culture clashes illustrated how seemingly insignificant actions can lead to profound cultural confrontations. The seniors' reprimands reflected the prejudices and superior attitudes held by some of the characters in Elizabeth Bennet's circle.

However, just as Elizabeth develops as a person throughout the story, so did I while living in Kuala Lumpur, learning the value of accepting others' differences. Like Elizabeth, I had to come to terms with my own prejudices and assumptions when I first read about Mr. Darcy before I could come to appreciate him for who he really was. The more I interacted with people of different backgrounds, the more I came to see that variety strengthens our society as a whole.

My experience with these personal cultural clashes allowed me to develop as a person and broaden my perspective on the world. Like the characters in Austen's story, I found strength in accepting uniqueness and being myself. Our community's unique cultural tapestry reflected Austen's evergreen message that kindness, empathy, and open-mindedness pave the way to peace and acceptance in our diverse world.



*A tense dinner at Lady Catherine de Bourgh's (Pride and Prejudice movie, 2005)*

